

office of the minister for children and youth affairs annual report 2008



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Foreword by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am delighted to contribute to the first Annual Report of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). As intended by Government, the expanded remit of the Office since my appointment in May 2008 has served to continually enhance and deepen the coordination of policy and services working with and for children and young people.

2008 has been another exceptionally busy year for the Office and I have worked with the Director General and staff of the OMCYA on a wide range of very important issues. In addition, my attendance at Cabinet has allowed me to ensure that issues affecting children were at the heart of Government decision-making. Throughout 2008, my Office brought a range of important policy processes to completion, while also continuing to work on remaining areas of challenging policy that are impacting on children's lives on a daily basis.

I had identified the area of child welfare and protection as a priority for 2008, for which my Office has responsibility for developing policy and legislation. To deliver on this, it is essential that all those working on this issue work closely and effectively together. Throughout the year, I have chaired regular meetings between my Office and the HSE, with a focus on improvements and reform of services. Our overall goal must be to ensure that the lives of our most vulnerable children are protected. To this end, a review of compliance with the *Children First* national guidelines was undertaken by my Office. The process and the outcomes of the review were most instructive, concluding that some revisions to the guidelines are essential but overall the challenge is to ensure implementation at local level. An updated set of guidelines will be published shortly to take account of the issues raised in the review process. However, the key challenge that remains is to ensure that implementation at local level is uniform and of the highest possible standard. This will remain my key focus for the year ahead.

The ongoing work of the Office to ensure that the voice of children and young people is central to policy considerations has also been a priority over the course of 2008. My Office conducted consultations with teenagers on mental health in six locations around the country to find out 'what hurts' or impacts negatively on teenage mental health and 'what helps' or impacts positively on their mental health. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of this process in 2009 and to working with policy-makers and service providers to consider the ways in which these important lessons can be integrated into their work. In addition to these national consultations, my Office continues to support both Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg.

The ongoing research programme run from my Office also continues to give an insightful picture of children and young people's lives. 2008 saw the publication of the second *State of the Nation's Children* report, which provides the latest statistics available and gives a description of the well-being of children and young people in Ireland. The report shows that overall Irish children are doing well, but there remains a number of areas where improvement is necessary. In this context, the findings are very useful in assisting in the difficult task of ensuring that resources are directed in the most appropriate and effective way.

Growing up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children completed the first round of data collection on the 9-year-old cohort. I am very grateful to the parents and children who have taken part in this study so far and it is my intention to publish early results in the coming months. While the long-term aim of this programme of research is 'to examine the factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families', it remains my hope that the findings can begin to inform decision-making along the way and therefore I see the publication of results as they become available as an essential component in this context.



Throughout 2008, the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children continued to meet to examine and consider the many issues raised for children in the Twenty-eighth Amendment to the Constitution Bill, published in 2007. Written and oral submissions have informed deliberations and a first interim report was published in September 2008, dealing with the issues of vetting and 'soft' information. The Committee has a complex and important set of issues to consider and I look forward to receiving their second report in mid-2009. It is my hope that by late 2009 the work of the Committee will be finalised and this will inform Government discussions.

Throughout 2008, my Office continued to progress work on the Adoption Bill, which will be published in January 2009. Ongoing liaison with the Adoption Board and the HSE has remained a priority for my Office in an effort to ensure the improvement of services for children and parents. My Office has also actively engaged in the review and development of bilateral inter-country adoption agreements with a number of jurisdictions.

I am also happy to report on the progress that has been made in the application of *The Agenda for Children's Services* throughout 2008 and the ongoing development and improvement of the Children's Services Committees and the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children, funded in partnership with The Atlantic Philanthropies. The four model Children's Services Committees have submitted plans and commenced implementation, the learning from which will be vitally important in informing the roll-out of this approach across the country. The Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children has completed the process of staff recruitment in all three project sites and the majority of programme activities have commenced.

Throughout the country, the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) continues to benefit children through the provision of quality childcare places. By the end of 2008, approximately €180 million of the NCIP's capital allocation had been committed, with almost €100 million drawn down. The capital commitments in place up to the end of 2008 are expected to result in the creation of 27,500 additional childcare places. Childcare provision is further enhanced by the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) and the Early Childcare Supplement (ECS), both of which continue to provide additional supports. The work of the County Childcare Committees at local level is a vitally important element of this infrastructure and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all those who work tirelessly to ensure that a high quality standard of childcare is delivered in every local community throughout Ireland.

2008 has been a challenging and busy year. The expanded remit of my Office now offers an opportunity to realise effective, evidence-based and cross-cutting policy objectives. I have no doubt that 2009 will present many new challenges, but I believe we are well placed to meet these, remembering that all challenges actually present opportunities to do the best thing for all children.

Barry Andrews, TD

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Introduction by the OMCYA Director General

The year 2008 was the third year of the Office of the Minister for Children. Following the appointment of a new Taoiseach in May, which resulted in a Cabinet reshuffle, the Office had its third Minister for Children appointed to it. As well as a change of Minister, the remit of the Office was extended to include the Youth Affairs Division of the Department of Education and Science, and the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. These Divisions were incorporated into the re-titled Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). The structural changes reflected the Government's intent to achieve further joined-up government around children's and young people's policies and services.

During 2008, the OMCYA worked successfully with children and young people who need specific supports to facilitate their participation so that they have a voice in matters that affect their lives – those with a disability, members of the Traveller community, those who had been in the care of the State, those whose parents were struggling with addictions and young people involved with the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme. Together with the OMCYA, these children and young people pioneered innovative ways of enabling the participation of hard-to-reach young people.

The second biennial report on the *State of the Nation's Children* was published in 2008. Its findings show that Irish children are doing well when measured against many of the national set of child well-being indicators, but improvements could be made in certain areas (such as breastfeeding and alcohol consumption). This benchmarking work will assist service providers to focus on those areas where challenges remain if outcomes for children and young people are to be improved.

Arising from a review of *Children First*, the national child welfare and protection guidelines, a number of publications were launched in July 2008. The main finding of the review was that while the *Children First* guidelines were robust and had stood the test of time, steps needed to be taken to ensure their implementation was universal and comprehensive.

In relation to Child Welfare and Protection Services, during 2008 the OMCYA and the Health Service Executive prioritised necessary reforms of these services and steps were taken to commence improvements in information systems, processes, structures and personnel, which work is ongoing. The Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children published its first interim report of three planned reports on its deliberations on proposals to amend the Constitution in respect of children. The first report recommended that the Government establish a statutory scheme for garda vetting, for the regulation of the collation, exchange and deployment of hard and soft information for the purpose of child protection and to require that all persons working with children are subject to vetting.

By the end of 2008, the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme, which was introduced to ensure that children in disadvantaged areas had access to childcare services under the National Childcare Investment Programme, was operating successfully and evidence was available to show that it was delivering to the most disadvantaged children. The capital investment in a childcare infrastructure continued and was not affected by the reductions in Exchequer capital expenditure generally.

During 2008, the four county Children's Services Committees, which are pioneering locally led strategic planning and delivery of children's services, continued their work and learning. Preparatory work was underway in the OMCYA with six other counties that wished to establish a Children's Services Committee in their county during 2009. The Prevention and Early Intervention Programme, supported in three sites by the OMCYA and Atlantic Philanthropies to promote better outcomes for children, is working steadily to demonstrate best practice in prevention and early intervention services for children. In addition, the OMCYA



worked with the Irish Youth Justice Service and the Early Years Education Policy Unit, both of which come within the delegated responsibilities of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in supporting them in the delivery of their strategies and programmes.

Overall, for the OMCYA, 2008 was a year of solid progress across all areas, with the single objective of ultimately delivering on the vision set out in the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010 and on the service implementation framework set out in *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* (OMC, 2007a).

Sylda Langford

Director General

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

1. About the OMCYA

Role of the OMCYA: A new way of working

In 2008, the role of the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) was expanded to become the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), as part of the Department of Health and Children. This Government decision builds on the progress made by the OMC and brings greater coherence to policy-making and service delivery for children. It realises the Government commitment to improving the lives of all children in Ireland under the National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2000).

In order to achieve this joined-up government approach to the development of policy and delivery of services for children, an amalgamation of staff from various Government departments has taken place. Staff working on childcare (from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), on child welfare and child protection (from the Department of Health and Children), on youth work and youth services (from the Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science) and from the former National Children's Office have amalgamated to form the OMCYA. Most staff are co-located in the OMCYA and are all working towards the single objective of ultimately delivering better outcomes for children.

The mandate given to the OMCYA by Government is to take a cross-cutting approach to issues, policies, services and structures for the achievement of better outcomes for children. This mandate was recognised in *Toward 2016*, which tasks the OMCYA with enabling all parts of the public service management to work strategically together, at national and local level, so as to achieve more effective and efficient delivery of children's services (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006).

The OMCYA focuses on harmonising policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, research on children and young people, and cross-cutting initiatives for children.

The OMCYA supports the Minister in:

- implementing the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010);
- implementing the National Childcare Investment Programme (2006-2010);
- developing policy and legislation on child welfare and child protection;
- implementing the Children Act (2001);
- implementing the Youth Work Act (2001).

The OMCYA also maintains a general strategic oversight of bodies with responsibility for developing and delivering children's services.

Vision

The vision of the OMCYA is an Ireland *'where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential'*.



Mission

The mission of the OMCYA is to put children and teenagers at the heart of Government policy through driving implementation of the National Children's Strategy, which commits to:

- giving children a voice in matters that affect their lives;
- gaining a better understanding of children's lives through evidence-based research;
- developing quality policies and delivering effective services for children.

Policy framework

The policy framework underpinning the work of the OMCYA is *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* (OMC, 2007a). This new policy approach involves integrated delivery of services in partnership with children, young people, their families and their communities. *The Agenda* is accompanied by a series of *Reflective Questions* for policy-makers, HSE senior managers and front-line managers and practitioners, which assist them to engage in reflective practice and effective delivery, and to identify their own role within the national policy framework.

International work

The OMCYA participates in and contributes to a range of international organisations, networks and initiatives relating to the international agenda for children at UN, EU and Council of Europe level, and represents Ireland at international conferences and conventions. The OMCYA participates in a number of key international networks, such as L'Europe de l'Enfance, ChildONEurope and the Council of Europe's initiative 'Building a Europe for and with Children'.

During 2008, the OMCYA participated in meetings of the European Forum on the Rights of the Child, which brings together key players – Member States, Ombudsmen for Children, Council of Europe, UNICEF, non-governmental organisations, civil society and other stakeholders – to promote the exchange of existing expertise, information, actions, results and good practices. The OMCYA also participated in the Council of Europe's Stockholm Conference to finalise a long-term strategy for the initiative 'Building a Europe for and with Children'. Through engagement with these important international organisations and networks, and with the facilitation of the permanent representatives of the Irish Government abroad, the OMCYA continues to contribute to a range of important international developments.

During 2008, work also commenced on the preparation of Ireland's joint 3rd and 4th Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child through formal contacts with all relevant Government departments, agencies and key stakeholders. This work will culminate in the submission of Ireland's report to the UNCRC in 2009.

2. Supporting and advancing best practice in participation by children and young people

The OMCYA has the lead role under the National Children's Strategy in ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of services and policies that affect their lives, at national and local level. The OMCYA is responsible for overseeing the development and improvement of participation structures and works to ensure that seldom-heard children and young people are included in participation structures and projects.

The work of the OMCYA is based on the belief that children and young people are the citizens of today and not just the adults of tomorrow. Working with young people has enhanced our understanding of the needs, concerns and interests of young people, and resulted in policies and practices that are more relevant and therefore more likely to be effective.

The OMCYA is working to become a centre of excellence for participation by children and young people in decision-making. Central to the success of this participation work is the collaborative interaction between participation and research expertise within the OMCYA, which ensures that best practice in young people's participation is a priority and that outcomes are robust and evidence-based.

Establishment of participation structures

In the last five years, the OMCYA has worked to ensure the establishment or consolidation of five key structures for the participation of young people:

- Comhairle na nÓg (local child and youth councils);
- the Inclusion Programme, to ensure participation of seldom-heard young people;
- Dáil na nÓg (National Youth Parliament);
- student councils;
- OMCYA Children and Young People's Forum.

In 2008 the following progress was made:

Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg are local child and youth councils, established under the National Children's Strategy in all 34 City and County Development Board areas of the country. Effective Comhairle na nÓg in every county will ensure that children and young people can participate in appropriate local and national decision-making. Delegates for the annual Dáil na nÓg (National Youth Parliament) are elected through the local Comhairle na nÓg. The operation of Comhairle na nÓg varies from county to county and many are in need of significant support. The development of effective Comhairle na nÓg throughout the country is a major OMCYA priority and is also cited in *Towards 2016* as a key innovative Government measure.

Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group

The Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group (CIG) was established by the OMCYA to devise a plan for the development of effective local youth councils. The CIG reported to the Minister for Children in April 2007, making interim recommendations for immediate implementation. Throughout 2008, the CIG worked on the development of a 2-year development plan, which will be completed and launched in early 2009. The members of the CIG are listed in Appendix 1.



Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund

In response to the recommendations contained in the CIG's 2007 report, the OMCYA established the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund and an independent evaluation process. This scheme aims to ensure that Comhairle na nÓg operate according to best practice and provide enhanced opportunities for the participation of children and young people in local decision-making. The scheme has proved hugely popular: 30 of the 34 Comhairle na nÓg received funding during 2007-2008, with OMCYA expenditure exceeding €660,000 over the period.

The report of the independent evaluation of the 2007-2008 Development Fund, to be published in early 2009, highlights significant progress in terms of the number of young people participating and the quality of the Comhairle na nÓg at local level. Recommendations for the future development of Comhairle na nÓg are also made and these have informed the criteria for the 2008-2009 Development Fund; requirements for this year include improved links with adult decision-makers and increased participation of the 12-15 age groups. To date, 33 of the 34 Comhairle na nÓg have applied and received funding from the 2008-2009 Development Fund. An independent evaluation for this period will also take place.

The Inclusion Programme

During 2008, the OMCYA continued to provide support for the inclusion of hard-to-reach young people in participation structures, in partnership with organisations that work with seldom-heard children and young people. Implementation of plans submitted by organisations for Year 1 of the Inclusion Programme was completed. An end-of-year celebratory event to mark the progress of the organisations and the young people took place with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, TD. An independent evaluation of Year 1 was undertaken and its finding will be published in early 2009.

Year 2 of the Inclusion Programme commenced in late 2008 and applications for funding from all participating organisations were received. Grants were awarded to all 7 organisations.

Dáil na nÓg

The 7th annual Dáil na nÓg took place on Friday, 15th February 2008 at Croke Park, Dublin. A total of 196 delegates from around the country, elected by their local Comhairle na nÓg, attended the event. In cooperation with the OMCYA, a consortium (consisting of the National Youth Council of Ireland, Foróige and Youth Work Ireland) holds the contract to run Dáil na nÓg during 2006-2008.

The two themes for discussion at Dáil na nÓg 2008 were 'Emotional and mental health for young people' and 'Education reform'. The discussion on mental health focused on:

- suicide;
- bullying;
- peer pressure;
- drugs and alcohol;
- mental health support services available to teenagers.

The discussion on education reform focused on:

- reform of the curriculum;
- assessment and the points system;
- student support services in education;
- sports and physical activity;
- teaching of languages.



As in previous years, 34 delegates were elected by their Comhairle na nÓg to serve on the Dáil na nÓg Council, whose objective is to follow up on the recommendations from the Dáil, with the support of the OMCYA and National Youth Council of Ireland. From the list of issues raised, the Council chose to progress two topics – ‘Student support services in education’ and ‘Mental health support services available to teenagers’. During the year, the Council conducted research into both topics to inform a set of key recommendations for action, which were presented to policy-makers in the relevant Government agencies:

- on the topic of ‘Student support services in education’, the Council focused specifically on the availability and quality of guidance counselling in second-level schools;
- on the topic of ‘Mental health support services available to teenagers’, the Council focused on the promotion of teenage mental health, including the establishment of more youth cafés, and worked closely with the National Office for Suicide Prevention to develop a positive Mental Health Public Awareness Campaign aimed at young people, to be launched in Autumn 2009.

The Dáil na nÓg Council will continue to work on these issues until early 2009, engaging directly with policy-makers, and then make its progress report to delegates at Dáil na nÓg 2009.

Student councils

Effective student councils in schools are cited in *Towards 2016* as an important measure for increasing participation in decision-making by young people. Thus, in 2007 the Department of Education and Science established the Second-level Support Service and appointed a Student Council Coordinator to work in collaboration with the Citizenship Education Support Team to provide information, resources and training to schools, aimed at principals, liaison teachers, planners, policy-makers, CSPE teachers and general staff.

During 2007, the OMCYA funded a new resource in the CSPE curriculum, entitled *Giving Young People a Voice: Student Councils in Schools* and developed by the City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development Unit (OMC and CDU, 2007). Issued to all second-level schools, it promotes the rights of children and young people to a voice in matters that affect their lives, as guaranteed under the National Children’s Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). It also incorporates information about Dáil na nÓg and Comhairle na nÓg, and their potential links with student councils.

A significant outcome of this *Giving Young People a Voice* project was the development of a teaching and learning *Resource Pack* of the same name, issued to schools and produced to support and promote the concept that the establishment and development of an effective student council is a process which for students begins with curriculum-based materials. The establishment of a student council, or the improvement of an existing one, is the action project accompanying the resource pack.

The work carried out and the learning outcomes from the *Giving Young People a Voice* project has also informed the roll-out of a national programme of in-service provision for Student Council Liaison Teachers. Since September 2007, cluster meetings of teachers have taken place in education centres around the country, with a 20-member team from the Associate Student Council Support Team introducing them to the resource *Giving Young People a Voice*; providing information about student councils; sharing experiences; and promoting good practice as outlined in the resource and in *Student Councils: A Voice for Students* (2002). Also, students of the post-graduate Diploma in Education at UCD and NUI Maynooth have been participating in workshops based on *Giving Young People a Voice* as part of their CSPE Methodology course. These workshops focus on the various methodologies recommended to be used in classes and give new teachers an opportunity to try out the activities for themselves. The aim is to encourage them to embed teaching about student councils either into their CSPE classes or as a broader education programme in their schools.

An extensive training programme for both teachers and members of student councils is also underway, including school network days, school support meetings and development planning of policies in schools. In addition, work is currently underway to expand the student council website, www.studentcouncil.ie, funded



by the OMCYA. Among its resources, it will contain downloadable documents and an interactive forum for teachers to share ideas and communicate with each another. Teachers who register with the site will be able to book courses online and receive e-mail alerts for upcoming events.

Consultations

Aware that mental health was one of the most pressing concerns for young people in Ireland today, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced that his Office would consult with young people themselves on the issue of 'Teenage Mental Health' in 2008. In partnership with the Health Service Executive and its National Office for Suicide Prevention, the OMCYA organised a number of consultations with young people around the country in order to elicit their thoughts on 'what hurts' or negatively impacts on teenage mental health, and also 'what helps' or positively impacts on mental health. The report on these consultations will be published in early 2009.

A total of 277 young people, between the ages of 12 and 18, participated in the consultations, based in centrally located hotels in Athlone, Sligo, Cork, Limerick and Dublin. While the participants were broadly representative of age and social background, almost double the number of young women attended than young men.

Eight themes emerged as key when asked 'what hurts' teenage mental health:

- self-image;
- school pressures and exam system;
- family;
- bullying;
- death;
- peer pressure;
- relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends;
- isolation.

While being judged for how you look and the pressures associated with school and the exam system were the two most significant areas of 'hurt' in relation to teenage mental health, death of a close family member or friend, the lack of facilities and the effects of peer pressure were also cited as key individual negative impacts on mental health.

On the subject of 'what helps', six key strategies emerged as helping to alleviate the 'hurts' identified and having a positive impact on mental health:

- school environment and the exam system;
- facilities for young people;
- supports for young people;
- relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends;
- self-image;
- family.

While a number of 'helps' were considered particularly important, having a youth café or safe space to hang out with friends was identified as paramount. Having less homework to enable young people to use such spaces in which to socialise and relax, especially at the weekends, was also identified as key. In addition, young people called for a reform of the exam system and a 'move from sole reliance on exams to continuous assessment'.

3. Gaining a better understanding of children's lives through evidence-based research

The National Children's Strategy states that '*children's lives will be better understood; that their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs and rights, and the effectiveness of services available to them*'. Accordingly, the OMCYA has set up a Children's Research Programme, the objectives of which are:

- to build up a more coherent understanding of children's development and needs among those working with children;
- to develop an evidence-based approach to decision-making at all levels, down to the point of delivery;
- to improve the communication, production and dissemination of research and information;
- to improve evaluation and monitoring of children's services.

These objectives are being met through a number of different research programmes, including:

- **Commissioned research**, such as *Growing up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children* and other commissioned research studies.
- **Capacity-building research**, based on the award of Masters, PhD and research placement scholarships within the OMCYA.
- **Developing a data infrastructure**, most notably through the publication of the biennial report *State of the Nation's Children*, the development and management of a database on children's research (www.childrensdatabase.ie) and the development of a National Data Strategy on children's lives.

Commissioned research programme

Growing up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children

The largest study commissioned by the OMCYA to date under its research programme is the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland, entitled *Growing up in Ireland*. The aim of this Government-funded initiative is '*to examine the factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families*'.

The study was commissioned in 2006 by the Department of Health and Children through the OMC, in association with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. A consortium represented by the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin was identified as preferred bidder for the study and the contract was signed in April 2006.

The study is monitoring the development of 18,000 children – an infant cohort of 10,000 and a 9-year-old cohort of 8,000 children – yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives (*for further details, see www.growingup.ie*). The first round of data collection for the 9-year-old cohort was completed in May 2008; the first round of data collection for the infant cohort, which is currently underway, is expected to be completed by April 2009.

While the findings from this study will provide important information in the short and medium term, its greatest value will be in the long term where it will be possible to examine the impact different sets of circumstances have on children's lives.



National Children's Strategy Research Programme

In addition to the *Growing up in Ireland* study, the OMCYA commissions and supports research into specific areas of children's lives. In 2008, the following new studies were commissioned:

- A study of the extent to which children undertake inappropriate care roles and the levels of impact such roles have on the lives of the children concerned. This research was commissioned by the OMCYA in fulfillment of a commitment given in the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*.
- A third phase of a longitudinal study of the process of youth homelessness. This research is jointly funded by the OMCYA and the Homeless Agency.
- The development of an interdisciplinary directory on health research about children (0-18 years) in Ireland in the last decade, in association with the Health Research Board.
- The commissioning of a report on the middle childhood period, using data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey.

The following research studies commissioned under the OMCYA Research Programme 2006-2009 were published in 2008:

- *Service Users' perceptions of the Irish Child Protection System*
Authors: Helen Buckley, Sadhbh Whelan, Nicola Carr and Cliona Murphy.
- *Young People on Remand*
Authors: Mairéad Seymour and Michelle Butler.

The following studies are ongoing:

- Children's perspectives on parenting styles and discipline.
- Parents' perspectives on parenting styles and discipline.
- Public Library Services for children and young people in Ireland.
- Ethics Committees and ethics approval for children's research in Ireland.
- Post-separation Parenting: A study of parent-child contact agreements and arrangements.
- A follow-up study on the educational and social support experiences of young people in long-term foster care.

Capacity-building research programme

The OMCYA considers that there is a need to further develop capacity in the area of children's research and provides support for this by funding for Masters and PhD students, and by offering a placement programme within the OMCYA.

National Children's Strategy Research Fellowships

The National Children's Strategy Research Scholarship Scheme was established in 2001 with the aim of developing research capacity in relation to children and supporting research directly related to the National Children's Strategy. Under this scheme, successful applicants receive an annual maintenance grant of €16,000 and also have their university fees paid in full by the OMCYA. In 2008, scholarships were awarded for the following:

- **Education:** Teaching autistic children through interactive communication (Masters Scholarship).
- **Psychology:** The experience of children who have a brother or sister with a chronic illness (Masters Scholarship).
- **Education:** Children's perspectives on the organisation of their learning in Irish primary schools (Doctoral Scholarship).
- **Social Policy:** The information-seeking behaviour and research utilisation of social workers (Doctoral Scholarship).



To date, 28 scholarships have been awarded. A detailed abstract of each thesis can be found on the OMCYA website (www.omc.gov.ie).

In 2004, the National Children's Strategy Research Scholarship Scheme was extended to include research placement awards, which give students the opportunity to work in the OMCYA. Two research placements were awarded in 2008, bringing to 12 the total number of placements since 2004.

Developing a data infrastructure

A third strand of the OMCYA's research programme is concerned with the building and development of a data infrastructure around children's lives. Three key actions are involved:

- reporting the *State of the Nation's Children* on a biennial basis;
- the development and maintenance of the database on children's research (www.childrensdatabase.ie);
- developing a National Data Strategy on children's lives in Ireland.

Reporting the *State of the Nation's Children*

Ireland's second *State of the Nation's Children* report was published in 2008 (OMCYA, 2008). This report provides the latest statistics available and a description of the well-being of children and young people in Ireland, and sets out a benchmark for developments in the future. It is based on a national set of child well-being indicators developed in 2005 (Hanafin *et al*, 2007) and includes 48 indicators of children's well-being considered to be important by multiple stakeholders, including children themselves.

The 2008 *State of the Nation's Children* was compiled by the OMCYA in association with the Central Statistics Office and the Health Promotion Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Background documentation and the report itself are available on the OMCYA website (www.omc.gov.ie). The key findings of the report are:

- **Education:** Irish children are ranked 5th highest across 29 OECD countries for reading literacy, while in maths and science they are about average. Children in higher social classes achieved higher mean scores than children in lower social classes.
- **Physical activity:** Irish children ranked 1st out of 41 countries in the amount of physical activity they undertake, with 54.8% reporting that they are physically active for at least 60 minutes per day on more than 4 days per week.
- **Smoking:** There has been a decrease in smoking among young people in Ireland, with 9.2% of Irish children (aged 11, 13 and 15 years) reporting that they smoke cigarettes weekly.
- **Birth weight:** The percentage of Irish babies born at low birth weight is 5.7% and compares favourably with the EU average of 7.3%.
- **Breastfeeding:** Breastfeeding rates on discharge from hospital are still low in Ireland (at 47.5%) compared with international data, but there has been an increase since 2001, when the breastfeeding rate was 41.3%.
- **Relationship with mothers:** The percentage of children who find it easy to talk to their mother when something is really bothering them is just under 80%, which is slightly less than the HBSC average of 81.5%.
- **Relationship with fathers:** 62.9% of children report that it is easy to talk to their fathers when something is really bothering them, which is marginally higher than the HBSC average of 61.7%.
- **Bullying:** 25.9% of children report to having been bullied, compared with an average of 32% in other countries where the HBSC survey was carried out.



Database on children's research

The primary focus of the OMCYA's database on children's research – available on its website www.childrensdatabase.ie – is to provide a resource of information for policy-makers, Government departments, academics, voluntary organisations and the general public. The website holds a collection of full-text policy documents dating from 1996 to the present (produced by Irish Government departments and approximately 70 State agencies) on issues that directly affect children. The database is fully indexed and contains abstracts and full publication details for each item, including the availability of Irish language and disabled access versions.

In addition, the website provides access to a collection of other databases, specialist libraries and Irish, European and international resources on children's lives. Links to information are organised according to the Schedule of Objectives in the National Children's Strategy.

All resources on childrensdatabase.ie are free of charge, with the exception of clearly identified resources that are licensed for the use of OMCYA staff (marked as 'access for OMCYA only').

During 2008, the website was further developed, with a new section relating to the *State of the Nation's Children* data incorporated. The 2008 report is available to download in an accessible format on a single indicator basis.

National Data Strategy on children's lives

Preliminary work has been undertaken in 2008 to support the development of a National Data Strategy on children's lives and this work will continue in 2009. The purpose of the strategy is to set out the vision, goals, principles and actions to guide and support the collection, compilation and dissemination of data, statistics and research on children, and will facilitate the utilisation of good quality, easily accessible, internationally comparable information about the lives of children in Ireland.

4. Developing quality policies and a legislative framework for children's services

The Agenda for Children's Services

Published in December 2007, *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* reflected a fundamental change in how Government policy on children is formulated and delivered (OMC, 2007a). The policy approach outlined in *The Agenda* involves integrated delivery of services in partnership with children, young people, their families and their communities. The core principle of the policy is the provision of health and social services based on supporting the child within the family and the local community.

The Agenda was published with a series of *Reflective Questions* booklets for policy-makers, HSE senior managers and front-line managers and practitioners. These questions will assist people working in any part of the children's health and social services system to check and possibly change the way they work in the light of learning from experience. The questions also assist individuals to understand where their own work fits into the wider system and to ensure that their work is effectively linked with that of other stakeholders in delivering better outcomes for children and families.

An important aspect of *The Agenda* is the setting out of 7 National Service Outcomes for Children in Ireland, namely: that our children should be – healthy, both physically and mentally; supported in active learning; safe from accidental and intentional harm; economically secure; secure in the immediate and wider physical environment; part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbours and the community; and included and participating in society. The HSE, in conjunction with the OMCYA, commenced development of an operational policy implementation plan for *The Agenda* in relation to its child and family support approach, linked to the implementation of the Knowledge Management Strategy (see below).

Monitoring the National Children's Strategy

The OMCYA has the lead role in monitoring implementation of the National Children's Strategy. Monitoring mechanisms continue to evolve since the publication of the strategy in 2000. Monitoring takes the form of reports prepared for the National Children's Advisory Council (NCAC) and regular updates on commitments made in *Towards 2016* to the social partners and under international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Other ad hoc reporting is produced as required. The establishment of the National Children's Strategy Implementation Group is also relevant in this regard (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 3).

In 2008, a new monitoring mechanism of the NCAC – a face-to-face dialogue on key issues with relevant Government departments and agencies – was introduced. Bilateral meetings were held on identified key themes with the Departments of Education and Science; Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and Social and Family Affairs. Details of these meetings are to be found in the Council's *End of Term Report 2005-2008* (NCAC, 2008). The members of the NCAC are listed in Appendix 2.

Child Welfare and Protection Policy

The role of the OMCYA in child welfare and protection is to develop the policy and legislative framework for care services for children and to work effectively with the Health Service Executive (HSE) to ensure implementation of the policy in the development and delivery of services. The development of legislation and policies that ensure quality services are provided to children is of benefit to society as a whole, but in particular to those children and their families who require support and assistance at vulnerable times in their lives.



The implementation and monitoring of these policies, with the child's best interests and welfare as the main guiding principle, should help us to enable children in society to reach their potential and live in a safer and happier environment.

Objectives for 2008

The area of child welfare and protection was identified as a priority area by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2008. To this end, the Minister chairs regular meetings between officials of the HSE and OMCYA, focusing on a range of issues relating to child welfare and protection services, such as reform of social work, resource issues, management information and out-of-hours concerns.

Knowledge Management Strategy

A significant achievement of the OMCYA's child welfare and protection policy in 2008 was the development of a Knowledge Management Strategy (KMS) by a KMS Steering Group, lead by the OMCYA with input from the HSE.

This work resulted in the creation of a comprehensive framework for the development and implementation of standardised work practices and technological approaches to addressing the problems we face in the short, medium and long term. A roadmap was prepared of the priority initiatives and practical actions required to empower policy-makers, managers and front-line staff in meeting the challenges. This was based on three categories of recommendations – increased collaboration, expanded outcome management and case management.

The implementation of this Knowledge Management Strategy is a high priority for 2009 within the wider reform agenda. The HSE is working on the standardisation, governance and ICT aspects of the strategy and is relating this work to the implementation of *The Agenda for Children's Services*.

Other child welfare and protection work in 2008

The Child Welfare and Protection Policy Unit of the OMCYA undertook work in the following key areas during 2008:

- Critical/crisis issues were dealt with as they arose and the Minister was supported in this regard.
- Significant work was undertaken towards the development of a statutory framework to underpin improvements in management of services for children before the Courts for care and detention services.
- The work of the independent inquiry to examine the full circumstances of the tragic deaths of the Dunne family in Co. Wexford was supported and completed.
- Progress was made in respect of improvements in Residential Care for Special Care/High Support services, in partnership with the HSE.
- An emergency Place of Safety Initiative was begun and advanced with the HSE.
- The OMCYA participated in North–South cooperation meetings and was also represented on the new Cross-border Barring and Vetting Group.
- The first year of the Garda Vetting Pre-School Services contract with 3 nominated bodies was administered successfully. The contract has been reviewed with all parties and renewed for 2009.
- A definition of policy on children under 12 in residential care was completed.
- The OMCYA engaged proactively with the HSE in developing the HSE's Service Plan for 2009.
- An international agreement was signed between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on the conditions of recuperation of minor citizens from Belarus in Ireland.



National review of compliance with *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*

At the launch of the *Report of the Ferns Inquiry*, published by the Department of Health and Children in October 2005, the then Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, TD, stated that 'a national review of compliance with the *Children First* guidelines by State bodies and NGOs will be driven by the National Children's Office [now the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs], in partnership with all relevant Government departments'. He explained that 'the *Children First* guidelines were published in 1999 and in the light of recent events, it is essential that the Government can stand over its own procedures in protecting children'.

The *Children First* national guidelines are designed to help people identify and report child abuse, including neglect, and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all people working with children and young people in correctly identifying and addressing child abuse. Protecting children from abuse and exploitation is crucial to a normal, happy and fulfilling childhood, and is a specific objective under the National Children's Strategy.

The national review of *Children First* was finalised and published in July 2008, consisting of three related documents (available at www.omc.gov.ie):

- National Review of Compliance with *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (OMCYA, 2008a);
- Analysis of submissions made on National Review of Compliance with *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (OMCYA, 2008b);
- *Service users' perceptions of the Irish Child Protection System* (Buckley *et al*, 2008).

The key finding of the national review of *Children First* was that, in general, difficulties and variations in relation to implementation of the guidelines arise as a result of local variation and infrastructural issues, rather than from fundamental difficulties with the guidelines themselves.

The OMCYA is currently working on an update of the *Children First* national guidelines, with a number of minor changes to reflect developments since they were first published in 1999. The Minister has emphasised that the substance and principles of the guidelines will remain unchanged.

Adoption legislation

The Adoption Bill will be published on 22nd January 2009 and initiated in Seanad Éireann early in 2009. The Bill provides for the restating and updating of the provisions of the Adoption Acts 1952 to 1998, as appropriate, and for the repeal of those Acts. It also gives force of law to the Hague Convention and provides for the making and recognition of intercountry adoptions in accordance with bilateral agreements. The Bill also establishes the Adoption Authority (to replace the Adoption Board).

Constitutional referendum on children

The Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2007 was published in February 2007. This Bill contained proposals to amend the Constitution in respect of children.

In line with a commitment made in the Programme for Government of June 2007 to deepen consensus on the proposals contained in the Bill, the Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children was established in November 2007 to examine, consider and make recommendations on the Bill. The Committee's original deadline to report back to the Oireachtas was within four months of its establishment, but due to the complexity and sensitivity of its work, this date has been extended on three occasions and the Committee is now due to report by 16th October 2009.



The Committee has produced two interim reports (available on the Oireachtas website, www.oireachtas.ie):

- The first interim report, published in September 2008, dealt with the issue of the exchange of 'soft' information. It recommended that the Government establish a statutory scheme for garda vetting, for the regulation of the collation, exchange and deployment of hard and soft information for the purpose of child protection and to require that all persons working with children are subject to vetting. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has welcomed the interim report and, in consultation with his Government colleagues, has commenced the process of preparing the relevant legislation. The Childcare (Collection and Exchange of Information) Bill is included in the Government's legislative programme for the Spring Session 2009.
- The second interim report is expected to be published in April 2009 and will deal with the issue of absolute and strict liability.

The Committee is continuing its deliberations on all remaining aspects of the proposed Constitutional Amendment and should finalise its work in late 2009. The Government awaits the Committee's final report before proceeding further in relation to a constitutional referendum on children.

5. Improving implementation of services and interventions for children at local level

National Children's Strategy Implementation Group and Children's Services Committees

The National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG), chaired by the OMCYA, was established in 2006 to ensure integration of service delivery, cross-sectoral working and the joint implementation of children's policies and initiatives. The current national social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, made a provision for the establishment of such a high-level group, the members of which are senior officials drawn from relevant Government departments, the HSE, representatives of local authorities, the education sector and other key agencies.

In 2007, the NCSIG approved the establishment of four multi-agency Children's Services Committees (CSCs) with the aim of testing models of best practice that promote integrated, locally led, strategic planning for children's services in order to secure better outcomes for children and families. These four CSCs – located in Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council, Donegal County Council and Limerick City Council – produced work plans and have commenced their implementation during 2008. The plans include actions to improve interagency information/data sharing, educational outcomes, child health and well-being, safety of children and families within their communities, child care, participation of children and young people, and economic security. Implementation of these plans will be monitored by the NCSIG. The learning from these four initial CSCs has been collected so that it can be made available to new CSCs as they are established.

The NCSIG decided to further roll out the CSC model and in December 2008, an invitation was sent to all HSE local health managers inviting them to submit proposals to establish a CSC within their area. When proposals have been received, the NCSIG and OMCYA will assess their readiness to establish a CSC in their area.

Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children

The Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children (PEIPC) was established by the OMC and The Atlantic Philanthropies to support and promote better outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas through innovation, effective planning, integration and delivery of services. The PEIPC, which was formally launched by the Taoiseach in February 2007, provides a policy framework and dedicated funding to support local demonstrations of best practice, backed up by in-depth and continuous evaluation of results.

The PEIPC will run for a 5-year period and have a fund amounting to €36 million in total (€18 million from Government and €18 million from The Atlantic Philanthropies). The Government agreed that the best use of this funding would be to focus on a small number of projects in severely disadvantaged communities. The three selected projects are:

- Childhood Development Initiative – A place for children in Tallaght West;
- Preparing for life (Northside communities of Belcamp, Darndale and Moatview);
- Youngballymun.

Service implementation for the three projects typically requires action among a range of local service providers in collaboration with their local communities. Thus, a number of statutory and non-statutory agencies will work together across sectors and collaborate on both service design and interagency delivery.



A key element of the PEIPC will be the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of both the outcomes of the activities undertaken and learning from the individual projects, thus providing an important input to policy and service development.

By the end of 2008, the recruitment of staff in all three project sites was complete and the majority of programme activities had commenced. In parallel with these developments, the commissioning of appropriate evaluation frameworks for each site was nearing completion, with support and input from an international panel of experts, the OMCYA and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

Forum on Prevention and Early Intervention for Children and Youth

The OMCYA held a series of seminars during 2008 to facilitate learning from local and visiting experts. The Forum on Prevention and Early Intervention for Children and Youth was hosted in collaboration with The Atlantic Philanthropies in May 2008. The speakers, panellists and exhibitors were all pioneers, pushing the boundaries in children's services. The aim of the forum was to support these pioneers, to produce a cross-fertilization of ideas and solutions, and to pave the way for a change in thinking across a wide range of stakeholders. By gathering together innovators and critical thinkers from policy, practice and academia, it is hoped to create a 'critical mass' around the conditions and relationships that we need to foster for the future.

Centre for Effective Services

As part of ongoing collaboration with The Atlantic Philanthropies, the OMCYA and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs spent some time exploring how Ireland could develop the competencies and capabilities for the design and evaluation of services so as to achieve better outcomes. The Centre for Effective Services (CES), consisting of a North-South project jointly funded by Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies, was established. The purpose of the CES is to provide coordinated and appropriate scientific, technical and organisational expertise to support full implementation of evidence-based services, with a particular focus on children's services.

National Play Policy/National Recreation Policy

Following the launch of *Teenspace: The National Recreation Policy for Young People* (OMC, 2007b), the OMCYA decided to expand the remit of the National Play Resource Centre (NPRC) to include the promotion of recreation for young people. A comprehensive tendering process failed to deliver a successful proposal to manage the expanded role and funding of the NPRC. As a result, the OMCYA has for the present taken the work of the NPRC in-house. The NPRC has been renamed the National Play and Recreation Resource Centre and a new website has been developed (www.nprc.ie). Local authorities have been contacted regarding a National Play Day (for 0-12 year-olds) and a National Recreation Event (for 12-18 year-olds) in 2009. The focus is on networking existing resources to best effect and raising awareness of play.

The OMCYA has allocated €600,000 under the Playbus Measure, via dormant accounts funding, for six local Playbus schemes. This measure is intended to provide interventions that support the family unit, by providing play development and parenting development outreach services to children and their parents experiencing social exclusion in disadvantaged and isolated areas.

The development of a framework for youth cafés was a key area of activity in 2008. Research was carried out by the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) on behalf of the National Children's Advisory Council and a draft report was submitted to the Minister for his consideration. The aim of this work is to ensure that funding is targeted and coordinated most effectively on a model, or models, of youth cafés that will meet the



needs of young people themselves. It will also ensure that any funding that may be available will augment, without displacing, existing interagency resources. The NUIG was also requested to prepare a toolkit and 'How to' guide to support groups setting up youth cafés, dealing with issues such as guiding principles, practical operational matters, advice and tips on the day-to-day management and ongoing development of a youth café. Final decisions on the development of a Youth Café Programme are expected in 2009.

Adoption

In 2008, the OMCYA liaised continuously with the Adoption Board and the HSE on developments in adoption services and the Adoption Bill, to be published in January 2009. The OMCYA was also actively engaged in the review and development of bilateral intercountry adoption agreements with a number of jurisdictions.

6. Facilitating the provision of childcare supports for families, particularly those in disadvantaged areas

National Childcare Investment Programme 2006 – 2010

The OMCYA is responsible for managing the implementation of the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010. The NCIP is part of the National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010, which commits to continuing the development of a quality infrastructure for childcare. The NCIP has a total Exchequer allocation of €575 million: €358m to provide for capital grants to develop childcare facilities and €217m in current funding to provide for other quality support measures.

The principal target of the NCIP is to create an additional 50,000 childcare places, 10,000 of which will have a focus on pre-school education for 3-4 year-olds and 5,000 for after-school care. Capital grants were available to both community-based and private sector childcare providers to build or refurbish childcare facilities.

By the end of 2008, approximately €180 million of the NCIP's capital allocation had been committed, with almost €100 million drawn down. The capital commitments in place up to the end of 2008 are expected to result in the creation of 30,000 additional childcare places, or 60% of the original target.

Community Childcare Subvention Scheme

The bulk of the NCIP current funding is expended on the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS). The framework for the scheme was finalised in December 2007 and the CCSS was introduced with effect from January 2008. The CCSS is funded under the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) and has a total allocation of almost €160 million over the 3-year period 2008-2010. The funding supports community-based childcare providers, enabling them to charge reduced childcare fees to disadvantaged parents. The CCSS is designed to be transparent and effective in targeting disadvantaged parents through the implementation of tiered fee structures based on the ability of parents to pay.

The NCIP also supports quality childcare initiatives, including the provision of funding to the 33 City and County Childcare Committees which provide local support to the childcare sector (including applicants for NCIP funding). A number of national voluntary childcare organisations are funded under the NCIP to facilitate quality improvements in the sector through the provision of training and other supports.

Childcare Regulations

The Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006 came into effect in September 2007 and the OMCYA has liaised closely with the HSE to facilitate their implementation in an effective and consistent way. A Working Group on National Childcare Standards was established by the OMCYA in late 2007 to develop a set of national childcare standards for service users and providers in accordance with the 2006 Regulations. The Group met regularly during 2008 and expects to complete its work by the end of 2009.

National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee

The National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (NCCC), established in 2000 and chaired by the OMCYA, provides a national forum for the childcare sector. The role of the NCCC is to advise and assist the OMCYA in relation to the National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010 and in relation to the development of a coordinated national approach to childcare provision. The members of the NCCC are listed in Appendix 4.



Early Childcare Supplement

The rate of payment of the Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) was increased from €1,000 per annum to €1,100 per annum with effect from January 2008. Amendments to the ECS arising from Budget 2009 provide for the reduction in the age limit for eligibility from 6 years to 5½ years, and a change in the frequency of payment from quarterly to monthly. Both these changes came into effect in January 2009.

7. Developing policy for early childhood education

Policy developments

The Early Years Education Policy Unit is an executive office of the Department of Education and Science, established to improve the quality of educational provision in childcare settings. The co-location of this Unit in the OMCYA is to ensure that policy developments in the early childhood sector are developed within an overall strategic policy framework for children.

Government investment in early years education has primarily been implemented through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-2006 and its successor programme, the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010, which is the responsibility of the OMCYA (see *Chapter 6*).

The 1999 White Paper on Early Education, *Ready to Learn*, identified a central role for the Department of Education and Science in improving the quality of educational provision in childcare settings. The White Paper also set out the key tenet that the Department would support the growth of, rather than replace, the wide range of existing provisions in the early childhood area.

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was established as an agency of the Department of Education and Science as part of the implementation of *Ready to Learn* (Department of Education and Science, 1999). The original remit of the CECDE included the development of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. This was successfully delivered in 2006 with the publication of *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and the CECDE ceased operation at the end of November 2008 (CECDE, 2006). The implementation of *Síolta* is now managed by the Early Years Education Policy Unit. Two former staff of the CECDE have been contracted to work within the OMCYA structure, as part of the Early Years Education Policy Unit, to assist with the implementation of *Síolta*. The Unit is working closely with the Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes, co-funded by the OMCYA and The Atlantic Philanthropies, on the implementation of *Síolta* in early childcare centres in these areas. In addition, the national voluntary childcare organisations have been invited by the OMCYA to submit plans to implement *Síolta* in partnership with the Early Years Education Policy Unit. Work has also begun on the development of an accreditation infrastructure, which will include the benchmarking of existing quality assurance programmes with *Síolta*. Other quality improvement measures underway include the development of a Curricular Framework for Early Learning by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. As with *Síolta*, this framework is applicable across all settings where young children are cared for and taught.

These quality frameworks support the investment taking place through the NCIP in pre-school places. The cross-departmental objective is that children will have access to quality pre-school places.

Current provision within the primary school sector

While the compulsory school age in Ireland is 6, children from the age of 4 can be enrolled in junior infant classes in primary schools. The most recent statistics (2006/2007) from the Department of Education and Science show that nearly half (44.7%) of 4-year-olds and virtually all (over 99%) 5-year-olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary schools. For pre-school children, the Department of Education and Science's interventions in early years have been targeted towards children who experience disadvantage or who have special needs.



These social inclusion measures include:

- The **Early Start** pre-school project, which was established in 1994/95 in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Galway, Drogheda and Dundalk. The project involves an educational programme to enhance overall development, help prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. The total number of spaces provided by the existing 40 Early Start centres is 1,680.
- The **Rutland Street Project**, established in 1969, is a pre-school facility attached to the Rutland Street primary school in Dublin. Although not part of Early Start, it was used to pilot many of the approaches later incorporated in the Early Start project.
- **Traveller pre-schools:** There are 29 pre-schools catering for approximately 300 Traveller children. The policy set out in the 2006 Traveller Education Strategy is to move towards integrated provision for Traveller services, including Traveller pre-schools (Department of Education and Science, 2006).
- **Special Education needs:** The Department of Education and Science funds a number of interventions, including 36 pre-school classes, to facilitate the demand for early intervention provision for children on the autistic spectrum. The Department also operates a home tuition scheme, providing funding for early educational intervention for pre-school children with autism.

8. Building an effective youth justice service for children and young people

Irish Youth Justice Service

The Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) is an executive office of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with responsibility for leading and driving reform in the area of youth justice. Guided by the principles of the Children Act 2001, its mission is *'to create a safer society by working in partnership to reduce youth offending through appropriate interventions and linkages into services'*.

The IYJS funds organisations and projects providing services, including Garda and Probation projects, to young people under 18 who find themselves in conflict with the law. These children may be involved with An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service and the Courts. The IYJS is also responsible for the management and development of children detention facilities.

The remit of the IYJS is to improve the delivery of youth justice services and reduce youth offending. This challenge is met by focusing on preventing criminal behaviour, diversion and rehabilitation, involving greater use of community-based interventions and the promotion of initiatives to deal with young people who offend, and the use of detention only as a last resort. Providing a safe and secure environment for those children who are detained and supporting their early re-integration back into the community is also a key function.

National Youth Justice Strategy 2008 – 2010

The National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010 was launched in March 2008 (IYJS, 2008) and sets out plans for the delivery of coordinated programmes and services in the area of youth justice through a number of Government departments and agencies, including the Departments of Education and Science, Health and Children, and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; the HSE; An Garda Síochána; the Courts Service; the Probation Service; and the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB).

The strategy is being progressed at national level by the National Youth Justice Oversight Group, chaired by the Director General of the OMCYA, which was established to facilitate the cross-agency collaboration needed. Goals and targets have been set for the various agencies involved to help measure progress and to assess where available resources should be targeted. Significant progress has been made under each of the high-level goals, the net effect of which is to create a more coordinated strategic approach, make better use of existing resources, create positive working relationships among stakeholders and deliver better outcomes for children in trouble with the law and for the community in general.

Communicating the message of the IYJS

During 2008, apart from launching the National Youth Justice Strategy, the IYJS held its first biennial conference, published the first edition of its own newsletter and launched its website, www.iyjs.ie.



Community sanctions

The IYJS, in cooperation with the Young Persons Probation (YPP) Division of the Probation Service, continued the roll-out in 2008 of the community sanctions provided for under the Children Act 2001 (as amended). Of the 10 sanctions, 5 are available nationwide and a further 4 are available in certain areas. The remaining sanction, the Suitable Person Order, will require legislative change before being fully available. Two further options available to the Courts – a Probation Family Conference and a Parental Supervision Order – have also been made available nationwide.

Emphasis on diversion

The number of Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) in 2008 remained at 100. To increase their effectiveness, the IYJS undertook a baseline analysis of the projects, reviewing their activities in the context of local youth crime patterns, the profile of young people who offend and the available evidence regarding best practice and improvements sought by the projects. The report on this baseline analysis neared completion at the end of 2008 and will be published in 2009, following which its recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the projects will be implemented.

The services provided by the GYDPs were also enhanced during 2008 by the part ESF-funded GYDP Employability Programme, which improves the education and employability prospects of young people engaged in the projects. It does so by providing funding for the provision of IT and Personal Development courses, and for an additional employee for each of the GYDPs. Over 40 of these were provided in 2008.

Children Detention Schools

The IYJS has responsibility for the management of the four children detention schools: Oberstown Boys and Girls and Trinity House Schools, which are on the same site near Lusk, Co. Dublin; and Finglas Child and Adolescent Centre.

In March 2008, the Government approved the development of new national detention facilities to cater for all children aged up to 18 years who are ordered to be detained by the Courts. These facilities are to be located on the Oberstown site and will increase the accommodation capacity in the system from 77 to 167 places. A Project Manager was appointed in May 2008 to oversee the development and the Office of Public Works was appointed in November to design the facilities.

A programme of refurbishment and development is ongoing in the existing children detention schools to ensure their continued operation until such time as the new facilities are developed. This will provide safe and secure accommodation, as well as improved conditions where practicable, for staff and children.

Measures are also being taken to integrate the detention schools and standardise policies and procedures across the four schools. A Directors' Forum has been established, with several policies developed and at various stages of implementation. Achievements in 2008 include a review of the serious incident policy in the schools and the development of a behaviour management model.

Also in 2008, the Government decided to establish a working group to examine future uses for the Finglas Child and Adolescent Centre. This group is expected to report its findings in 2009.

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Appendix 1: Members of the Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group (CIG)

Name	Organisation
Ms. Anne O'Donnell, <i>Chairperson</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Mr. Fergal Somerville, <i>Secretary</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Mr. Joe Allen	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mr. Brendan Buggy	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mr. Seán Campbell	Foróige
Mr. Rudi Corcoran	Carlow Comhairle na nÓg
Mr. Tom Costello	Irish Vocational Education Association
Ms. Margaret Crawley	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Mary Cunningham	National Youth Council of Ireland
Mr. Michael Curran	Louth County Council
Mr. Kieran Donohoe	Ferns Diocesan Youth Service, Youth Work Ireland
Ms. Maria Donohoe	South Dublin County Council
Mr. James T. Doyle	Fingal Comhairle na nÓg
Mr. Daniel Flanagan	Clare Comhairle na nÓg
Ms. Jennifer Gargan	Irish Association of Young People in Care
Ms. Lisa Grant	Waterford City Council
Ms. Claire Hartley	Waterford City Council
Ms. Audrey Hegarty	Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Science
Mr. Glenn Keating	Pavee Point
Ms. Jessica Kelch	Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg
Ms. Hilary Kendlin	South Dublin County Council
Mr. Martin MacEntee	Irish Vocational Education Association
Ms. Mary Mallon	Dun Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council
Mr. Seamus Mannion	Health Service Executive, Western Area
Mr. Garry McMahon	Galway City Council
Ms. Deirdre Phelan	Curriculum Development Unit
Ms. Mairead Ryan	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mr. Matthew Seebach	Youth Work Ireland

Appendix 2: Members of the National Children's Advisory Council (NCAC) 2007

Name	Organisation
Mr. Peter O'Brien, <i>Chairperson</i>	
Ms. Gillian Barwise, <i>Secretary</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Elizabeth Canavan ¹	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Nicola Conroy	Children and Young People's Forum
Ms. Maria Corbett	Children's Rights Alliance
Ms. Genevieve Donohoe ²	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mr. James Doyle	Children and Young People's Forum
Ms. Norah Gibbons	Barnardos
Ms. Geraldine Graydon	National Parents Council – Primary
Ms. Irene Gunning ³	National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee
Mr. Charlie Hardy	Department of Health and Children
Mr. David Hopkins	<i>Ministerial nominee</i>
Ms. Alison Jack	Children and Young People's Forum
Ms. Isobel Jones	Children and Young People's Forum
Mr. Diarmuid Kearney	National Youth Council of Ireland
Mr. Seamus Mannion	Health Service Executive
Mr. George Maybury	<i>Ministerial nominee</i>
Ms. Mary Meaney	National Disability Authority
Mr. Finbarr Murphy	An Garda Síochána
Ms. Collette Murray	Pavee Point
Dr. Saoirse Nic Gabhainn	National Children's Research Advisory Board
Ms. Jackie O'Callaghan ⁴	National Parents Council – Post-Primary
Ms. Ann Marie O'Connor ⁵	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr. Michael O'Connor	Focus Ireland
Mr. Micheál Ó Fiannachta ⁶	Department of Education and Science
Ms. Caroline O'Sullivan ⁷	ISPC
Mr. Paul O'Toole	Children and Young People's Forum
Sr. Catherine Prendergast	Conference of Religious in Ireland
Ms. Bernie Priestly ⁸	Irish Sports Council
Dr. Dermot Stokes	<i>Ministerial nominee</i>
Ms. Gaye Tanham ⁹	The Arts Council
Ms. Jennifer Wallace	National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

¹ Replaced Ms. Marie Kennedy

² Replaced Mr. Eamon Waters/Mr. Neil Maher/Ms. Sorchá Byrne

³ Replaced Ms. Maire Uí Aíninn

⁴ Replaced Mr. Jim Jackman/Mr. Gerry O'Reilly

⁵ Replaced Mr. Heber McMahon

⁶ Replaced Mr. P.J. Breen/Ms. Audrey Hegarty

⁷ Replaced Mr. Paul Gilligan

⁸ Replaced Ms. Ann Marie Hughes

⁹ Replaced Ms. Jean O'Dwyer

Appendix 3: Members of the National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG)

Name	Organisation
Ms. Sylva Langford, <i>Chairperson</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Mr. Stephen O'Brien, <i>Secretary</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Mr. Pat Bennett	Family Support Agency
Mr. Aidan Browne	Children Acts Advisory Board
Ms. Elizabeth Canavan	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Aoife Davey	National Drugs Strategy Team
Ms. Nuala Doherty	National Education Welfare Board
Mr. Michael Donnellan	Probation and Welfare Service
Mr. Des Dowling	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mr. Pat Dowling	Limerick City Council
Ms. Marie Dullea ¹	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Helen Faughan	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr. Pat Fitzgerald	Health Service Executive
Dr. Aisling Gillen	HSE Office of the CEO
Mr. Charlie Hardy	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Supt. Louis Harkin	An Garda Síochána
Mr. John Hayes	Health Service Executive
Mr. Joe Horan	South Dublin County Council
Mr. Hugh Kane ²	Chair, South Dublin Children's Services Committee
Mr. Brendan Kenny	Limerick Regeneration Agencies
Mr. Denis Leamy ³	Pobal
Mr. Fergal Lynch	Department of Health and Children
Mr. Seamus Mannion	Health Service Executive
Mr. Michael McLoone	Donegal County Council
Mr. Ciaran McNamara	Dublin City Council
Ms. Bairbre Nic Aongusa	Department of Health and Children
Ms. Anne O'Donnell	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Mr. Gerry O'Neill	Health Service Executive
Mr. Tim Scully	Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism
Ms. Michelle Shannon	Irish Youth Justice Service
Ms. Kathleen Stack	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Mr. John Treacy	Irish Sports Council

¹ Replaced Ms. Marie O'Reilly

² Replaced Mr. Jim Breslin

³ Replaced Dr. Tony Crooks

Appendix 4: Members of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (NCCC)

Name	Organisation
Ms. Sylva Langford, <i>Chairperson</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Emma-Jane Morgan, <i>Secretary</i>	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Ms. Elizabeth Bowen	Chambers Ireland
Ms. Aisling Byrne	FÁS
Cllr. Anne Carter	Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly
Ms. Veronica Cawley	Border Midland Western Regional Assembly
Ms. Dorothy Clarke	Sligo County Council
Ms. Anne Conroy	Barnardos
Ms. Treacy Costello	St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association
Dr. Tony Crooks	Pobal
Mr. Brian Dignam	Health Service Executive, East Coast Area
Mr. Declan Dunne	Planet
Ms. Siobhan Fitzpatrick	High Scope Ireland
Ms. Cliona Frost	Forbairt Naíonraí Teo
Ms. Irene Gunning	Irish Pre-Schools Playgroups Association
Ms. Nóirín Hayes	Dublin Institute of Technology
Ms. Teresa Heeney	National Children's Nurseries Association
Mr. Jim Hewison	Southern & Eastern County Childcare Committee
Ms. Catherine Hynes	Department of Education and Science
Ms. Mary Keane	Action South Kildare Ltd.
Ms. Maura Keating	Pobal
Mr. Alex MacLean	Border Midland Western County Childcare Committee
Ms. Finola McDonnell	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
Ms. Colette Murray	Community Pillar
Ms. Patricia Murray	Childminding Ireland
Ms. Orla O'Connor	National Women's Council of Ireland
Ms. Moira O'Mara	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
Mr. Pearse O'Shiel	Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Education Association
Ms. Vivienne Rattigan	Irish Congress of Trades Unions
Mr. Heino Schonfeld	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Ms. Mary Sherry	Irish Farmers Association